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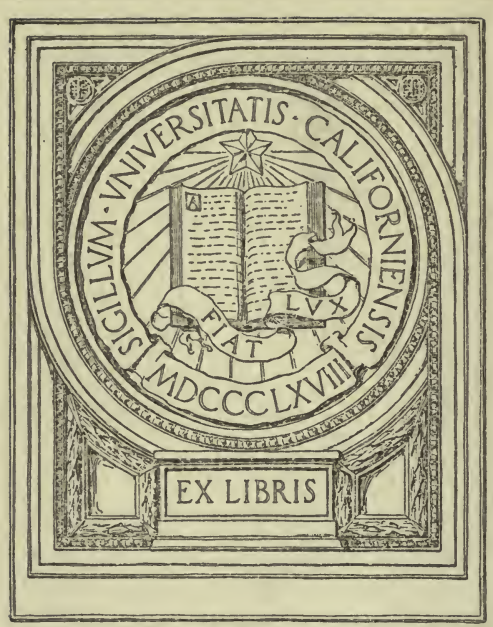
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Maurice
Maeterlinck

THE

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BY

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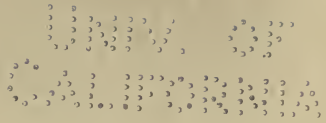

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Maurice Maeterlinck:

A Biographical Study : With Two Essays by M. Maeterlinck *Translated* from the French of Gérard Harry by Alfred Allinson

With Nine *Illustrations* and *Facsimile*

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MAURICE MAETERLINCK

"The little gleam that flickers on the horizon, one cannot tell yet if it is a rush-light or a planet." In these or some such terms was Maeterlinck referred to, at the end of 1889, by one of the first critics of the *Princesse Maleine*. The writer had not been convinced by Octave Mirbeau's dithyramb, who, like another "wise man from the East," had greeted the little Princess "with the strange white lashes" as the shepherds' star of a poetical Messiah.

In very deed Maeterlinck's first humble essays in literature recall the lowly birth of the "Divine Child" in the dim poverty of a rustic manger—with this

difference, that morally they were far more wretched. The *Princesse Maleine* was born in a stable, that is to say in a work-room a few feet square, where Maeterlinck, with a friend's help, printed off twenty copies on a hand-press, the wheel of which he worked himself. But no ox or ass, with big eyes of wonder, gave him their meed either of love or admiration. Their looks were indifferent or hostile.

Son of a "propriétaire," and educated for the bar, Maeterlinck had scandalised with his dreamy ways the practical and cold-blooded bourgeoisie of Ghent. All Belgium, a prey to the fever of material appetites which always racks nationalities at their first emergence into manhood, was industrial, industrious, and obstinately enslaved to things of the earth earthy. The enigmatical poet of the *Serres Chaudes*, the young wonder-working dramatist, at once so ill-assured and so daring, of the

MME. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK IN THE PART OF "YGRAINE"

Princesse Maleine, the future philosopher of *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (Wisdom and Destiny), had his beginnings in an atmosphere inimical to any and every flight of fancy. . . .

Three budding authors—Maurice Maeterlinck, Charles Van Lerberghe, Grégoire Le Roy, had recognised each other's gifts and exchanged clandestine stimulus as pupils of a Jesuit college on the banks of the Lys,[1] to find themselves later on in communion with a fourth—Émile Verhaeren—in the lecture-rooms of the local

[1] They had clubbed together to subscribe to the *Jeune Belgique* of Max Waller, the new-born review which was sounding with loud, aggressive trumpet-blasts the awakening of Belgian literature, the pages of which they devoured in secret conclave, much as other schoolboys smoke their first surreptitious cigarettes. Maeterlinck even contributed, when still a collegian, to the *Jeune Belgique*, under the pseudonym of "Mater," his first effort, a little poem which Max Waller, that cherub of letters, inserted with a light, half-joking commentary of his own. Date,

university. Sheer contempt, culminating even in cruel insults, had been their fate in the Flemish city which they were yet to glorify with the nimbus of an intellectual Bethlehem. The poet Charles Van Lerberghe, author of the *Flaireurs*, sombre elder brethren of the *Princesse Maleine*, *L'Intruse* and *Les Aveugles*, has since written the golden pages of the *Chanson d'Ève* [1] and *Pan;* yet he died in 1908, wrecked, disheartened, misun-

1883; title, *Les Joncs* (The Rushes), triolets beginning thus:—

"La barque glissait doucement
En frôlant les ramures vertes:
Sur le ruisseau clair et dormant
La barque glissait doucement;
Une brise amoureusement
Enflait les voiles entr'ouvertes."

(The boat glided softly, grazing the green boughs: over the clear, sleeping brook the boat glided softly; a breeze amorously puffed out the half-spread sails.)

[1] Which in these latter years has inspired the music of Gabriel Fauré, the successor of Ernest Reyer at the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

derstood to the last amid the refractory surroundings of his birthplace. Grégoire Le Roy, author of *Mon Cœur Pleure d'Autrefois*, disheartened by the general lack of comprehension, has had to capitulate to the necessities of every day and has turned electrical engineer—the André Chenier of a bloodless, but not less ruthless, guillotine.[1] As for the ardent genius of Émile Verhaeren, *he* has mastered the same chilling obstacles only after years of struggle, years of heroic obstinacy.

[1] These lines had just been written when, through the influence of sundry friends and of the Rev. Father Rector of the Collège Saint-Michel, brother of M. Grégoire Le Roy, the latter seemed likely to obtain a post as academical librarian, to rescue him, if not too late, from the electric industry and restore him to poetry. But it appears from a letter written me by Grégoire Le Roy that the opponents of his candidature for this post alleged against him as a damning fault this very fact of his being a poet. Official and industrial hostility to letters has not yet, it seems, been disarmed where he is concerned.

What would be Maeterlinck's fate? . . . In the first place he had to demonstrate his unfitness for the profession of the law for which he was intended. In this he succeeded brilliantly. With triumphant ease he lost the first cases entrusted to him—the first, and the last! At twenty-seven, in 1889, his career as an advocate was already closed, and his true career opening. . . . The episode alone suffices to justify that faith in mystic predestinations which permeates the work of this great thinker, from the *Princesse Maleine*, in which all the characters seem puppets of an inexorable Destiny, to the *Oiseau Bleu* (The Blue Bird), where we see the new-born arriving in the world, like actors coming on the stage, with parts all written out beforehand from beginning to end—this tender babe loaded with the tools of his future inventions, that rosy-cheeked cherub bringing with him

from his limbo the instruments of the crimes he is fated to commit on earth. Whatever might have been Maeterlinck's personal share in the governing of his life, there can be no doubt Destiny would have forbidden him the lawyer's gown. He was pre-ordained never to overcome, in obedience to the paternal behest, his inborn repugnance to the laurels of Cicero, to that science of law which struck him as resembling at one and the same time "a Roman cemetery and a modern builder's yard." To hinder him effectually, the occult power of Fate had put a gag in his mouth. Within his sturdy, full-fleshed Flemish body, such as Jordaens loved to paint, she had lodged a thin, harsh voice that was bound before long to preclude him, willy-nilly, from all idea of ever becoming a fountain of eloquence. Moreover, in his soul she had installed the happy defects which render a man

intrinsically unfit for the noise and publicity and loquacity of the Courts—an almost savage shyness and a proud passion for solitary meditation. The story has often been told in England of the meetings of two taciturn celebrities, Carlyle the Historian and Tennyson the Poet Laureate. The pair would sit opposite each other for hours together, never once opening their lips except to remove or replace their lighted pipes. Their looks alone exchanged the secret of their inward thoughts. On parting, their voices would be heard for the first time :

"What a delightful evening!" the first would say.

"Let us have another soon!" would reply the other.

Maeterlinck has always been akin to Carlyle and Tennyson in virtue of the dumbness of his eloquence. When, after stripping off for ever the odious gown,

badge of the wordy advocate, he removed to Paris to enjoy the period of learned leisure from which he was to bring back his *Serres Chaudes* and the memory of his collaboration in the short-lived review, the *Pleïade*, his taciturnity amazed, and presently impressed the poets with whom he associated,—Mikhael, Jean Ajalbert, Pierre Quillard, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé. A little later, in Belgium, there were—notably with Edmond Picard—long conversations, equally inarticulate, amid the floating blue clouds of tobacco-smoke. In the ever-waxing hurly-burly of our hustling modern civilisation Maeterlinck appears like a mediæval visionary, lost in deep contemplation, with closed lips and mind intent on the beauty, the sadness, or the horror of sights invisible to the majority of mankind, but which fill with the changing light and colour of their reflections his great, clear

eyes. Yet he has always been ready to hearken to others—betokened by the fact that his ideas were at one time modified (he has said so himself) by the fantastic and subversive notions of the author of the *Ève Future* and the *Contes Cruels*. Again, he has lent the profoundest attention, in books, to a long line of ancestors and contemporaries: to the mystics Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, Novalis, Emerson—witness his translations and commentaries of their works; to the romantic poet-playwrights of the Elizabethan age—witness his adaptation of Ford's *Annabella;* to the Latin and Greek philosophers, as well as to the modern German metaphysicians—witness, among a hundred other tokens, his contrast of the two moralities of Jesus and Seneca in his very last work, *Marie Madeleine*.[1]

[1] Recently played for the first time at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, pending its publication and representation in Russian, French, &c.

But to any sort of oratorical display, to any intercourse with living lights, no matter how brilliant, he has consistently preferred reflection, self-examination, self-concentration—in other words, to live isolated among the conjectures and dreams that people an imagination so opulent as to be self-sufficing.

Why this horror of the spoken word, this shrinking from society, even that of the elect? I explain it by the dread of being too different from the mass of men to be intelligible to them; the rapturous sense of free immensity vision acquires in face of illimitable horizons on untrodden mountain-tops; the instinctive repulsion that the vain show, the frivolous ostentation of every-day life must inspire in one who searches the depths so profoundly he cannot regard seriously the crawling animalcula that agitate the surface.

At every stage of Maeterlinck's existence

may be noted, under all forms, the same inveterate dislike and distrust of society, of hampering formularies, of intrusion into the sanctities of his personal feelings. Look at the young author tracing his first essays in literature in his firm, round handwriting, surrounded by reproductions of works by Burne-Jones, Odilon Redon, Georges Minne, in his narrow working-room at the family villa of Oostacker, near Ghent. When he drops the pen, it is to visit the garden to look after the bees which later on will inspire him to a masterpiece of patient observation and scientific poetry, or to turn on his lathe articles whose only utility is to save him from barren and banal conversations. If he goes abroad, he avoids contact with his fellows by flying off on bicycle rides alongside the great lonely meadows, or hours of boating on the " sombre, unbending canals " he has

Mme. Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck in the part of "Joyzelle"

described in his *Sept Princesses*, or in winter a fast and furious day's skating, carrying him, and his thoughts, far out of reach of all intrusion—away into Holland.

One morning he "awakes to find himself famous"; the sounding rhetoric of Octave Mirbeau's article on the *Princesse Maleine* has done it. Notwithstanding a legend that is hard to kill, there were others, in Belgium, who anticipated the French critic in signalising this drama, as new and fresh as the morning. In the *Jeune Belgique*, above all, Iwan Gilkin was the first to analyse it and, with a rare intuition, to divine the birth of a new genius, characterising the play as "an important work, that marks an epoch in the history of the stage." But it needed the thunderclap of Mirbeau and its reverberating echoes to break the lethargic silence of Belgium and give an

unforgettable *éclat* to the name of Maeterlinck. Though the latter deems the eulogy exaggerated, still it gives him a certain consciousness of his own powers, a confidence in his art, which he had hitherto lacked. Yet he is frightened, almost bewildered, at the interest he excites henceforth as a "phenomenon"; he writes to a friend (I have the original letter before me, dated October 4, 1890):

"I beseech you *in all sincerity*—I repeat, *in all sincerity*—if you can stop the interviews you speak of, stop them. I am getting horribly tired of all this. Yesterday, as I was at dinner, two reporters of the [follows the name of a newspaper] plopped into my soup. I am off to London; for I am sick and ill of these new experiences. So, if you cannot prevent the interviews, the fellows will have to interview my servant-maid."

In his revolt against the hurly-burly his

name arouses, Maeterlinck becomes unjust in his self-depreciation. He speaks of his first theatrical production as *Shakespearterie* and his budding fame as glory *à la Rollinat*. Already he is seized by a panic terror of the great world, its uproar, its conventional grimaces, its ephemeral and tyrannical caprices of fashion.

Replying to a friend who invites him to dinner at Brussels, he writes :

"On condition you receive me with the most absolute simplicity. All ceremony alarms me. I am a peasant."

Four or five years go by, and Maeterlinck has not yet found in his native place any better encouragement than manifestations of empty curiosity, or worse still, insolent official hostility.[1] He

[1] He had dreamt of some modest post in the public service that would have allowed him to pursue his literary career with a minimum of pre-occupations. It was refused him, *precisely because of his early writings*, and in terms more or less recalling the insult

tears himself from the ungrateful soil; and here he is in Paris. There book succeeds book — all admirable. Notoriety expands into fame. In the capital of the intellectual life, so eager to pry into the secrets of the originalities it shelters and which it was the first to welcome and consecrate, he finds means, for years, to render himself inaccessible, invisible, save to two or three intimates. He might have been in a prison cell, such pains is he at to safeguard his freedom, to preserve his incognito;[1] eventually he disappears

offered by a "certain M. de Ribeaucourt" to Victor Hugo. It was the time when the Belgian Government refused to decorate writers because they were not functionaries, and declined to make them functionaries because they were writers.

[1] At this period he lived successively in the Rue Raynouard, the Rue Pergolèse, in a house at Passy of which Balzac had once been the tenant. Nowadays, whenever business connected with the publication of his books summons him to Paris, he takes up his quarters in a remote corner of the outer suburbs—at Neuilly.

from Paris without a soul being any the wiser at the very time his works are being produced and applauded on the Parisian stage—the metrical version of *Pelléas et Mélisande*[1] by De Bussy, or *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, music by Dukas. The atmosphere of a great city, seldom as he breathed it, had grown intolerable to him. One day it is discovered he has gone to live with Nature or among ruins —in winter, his future home is at the Quatre Chemins, near Grasse, an earthly Paradise of flowers, whose secrets he will draw from them, after telling so delightfully those of their lovers, the bees; in summer, at the wonderful old Normandy Abbey of St. Wandrille,[2] vacated by the

[1] *Pelléas et Mélisande* has likewise inspired the composer, Fauré, whose score has been performed successively on the concert platform and the stage.

[2] The author of the present monograph has published a description of these two residences in the *Petit Bleu* of Brussels—28th and 29th September

Benedictines since the law dealing with the Religious Orders, and one of whose ancient walls bears an inscription cut three hundred years ago by the knife of an ecstatic monk, a distich that might well be Maeterlinck's own motto :

" O beata solitudo,
O sola beatitudo ! "

Fortune came to him along with renown, for from this time forward his books are read everywhere . . . even in Belgium ; they are translated into all languages ; Germany, Russia, America

1907 and 22nd, 23rd, and 24th March 1908. In the last two of these issues he has also given an analysis of the *Oiseau Bleu*, the fairy drama which was very soon to be produced with immense success at Moscow, and which has not yet been played on any French-speaking stage.

It is well to mention, in connection with the Abbey of St. Wandrille, that Maeterlinck rescued it from vandalism, buying it just when it was about to fall into the hands of a commercial syndicate to be converted into a chemical works.

ST. WANDRILLE

The climbing plants have overrun the cloisters, the stones of which are crumbling into dust.

bid against us for the first rights in his fairy pieces and his dramas. And the use he puts his wealth to is to fly the society of his kind more and more, to wrap himself more completely than ever in solitude and reverie—in the dignified repose of an old Abbey where only the dust of the old monks remains beneath the worn flag-stones of a Gothic cloister, or else amid an ocean of greenery and flower-bells that are dumb too, save for a sigh.

At last his native Belgium, now standing four-square and prosperous, craves, like the parvenue tradesman's wife she is, to bedeck her cap with a bright touch of the ideal, longs for the luxury of literature, discovers that she has one, is fain to recall the ostracisms of another day, acclaiming her poets and, foremost of them all reclaiming Maeterlinck for her own, to caress him and do him honour all she can.

Maeterlinck refuses. He stubbornly resists all attempts at apotheosis, and in his private letters, expressing his aversion to noisy demonstrations, he is amazed that this or any sort of intellectual celebrity should be by way of "debauching his genius."

Thus in the full summer of his years he is exactly what he was in his first spring-tide—unshakable in his determination to see mankind, from a height and from afar, without being seen of them.

"O beata solitudo!"

* * * * *

Have I insisted at too great length on this inborn and inflexible hermit disposition? The truth is, this is the master-key that unlocks the secret of the man and of his work. A voluntary exile from the world, such a mind was bound of necessity to find its expansion outside its century, above and beyond its period.

How should the sights and discordant sounds of workaday existence absorb such an intellect? From the heights where he dwells aloof, his eye embraces the whole perspective of the ages, past, present and to come. The crowd of his contemporaries appears beneath his feet like a tiny ant-hill far down in a vast and distant valley, and the passing hour sounds in his ear like one of the countless waves that rise and toss and subside unceasingly in the eternity of the ocean. As a fact, there is hardly one of his books bears the impress of its epoch, of any epoch. Almost all might have been conceived and written a thousand years ago in the past, and might equally no doubt be produced in any one of the thousands of years to come.

Not that I would wish to make him a god who had never trod our earth; or an egoist, rendered indifferent and a

stranger to the current of contemporary existence by his anxious absorption in the days of yore and the days to come, his familiarity with the depths of earth and the clouds of heaven.

We saw just now a Maeterlinck of a very human sort, a man of solid muscles and sturdy build, developing his animality by manual work of various sorts or athletic exercises. As the law directs, he was at one time a member of the Civic Guard of Ghent, and we have a letter of his of that time, dealing with literary questions, which begins thus : [1]

" Your epistle arrived this afternoon, while I was out in the country getting my bees into winter quarters. I came home very late, and as I have an inspection of arms to-morrow morning, I have still got to clean my Guard's musket, which is horribly rusty."

[1] From a letter to Grégoire Le Roy.

Well, we may be sure Maeterlinck "polished up" his gun with as much care and energy as the most practical Philistine of all the Ghent citizen-soldiers. In his *Double Jardin* (The Double Garden) he discourses on the automobile, "the magic horse," not only as a poet and a philosopher but as a thoroughly well-informed mechanic and a fully-trained chauffeur. In the same book he talks about breaking dogs and matters as worldly and present-day as universal suffrage and the games of roulette and "trente et quarante." His *Vie des Abeilles* (The Life of the Bee), where the lyrical descriptions soar in places to heights as transplendent as the nuptial flight of the queen of the hives and her lovers, to altitudes neither Lucretius nor Virgil overpassed, bears witness nevertheless to a minuteness of observation and a scrupulous scientific accuracy worthy of

a Buffon or a Lubbock, but extraordinarily rare in thinkers devoted to sublime generalisations. He says himself somewhere that at the time his friends intended him for the law, his own inclination was for medicine or some other exact science. His account in the *Intelligence des Fleurs* (The Intelligence of Flowers) of the processes of perfume-making might be the work—barring the enchanting style—of a chemist or a manufacturer of extracts of jasmine and violet. Here is a story, hitherto unpublished, that brings out agreeably his passion for precision in the smallest details. The picturesque "painter with the pen" Eugêne Demolder[1] had sent him the very first copy of his *Jardinier de la Pompadour*. Next day, the author of the *Intelligence des Fleurs* arrives post-haste,

[1] Author of the *Route d'Émeraude*, put into verse and on the stage by Jean Richepin.

at the top-speed of his automobile, at the Demi-Lune at Essonnes, in the Seine-et-Oise, where Demolder composed this charming and sweet-scented romance of the Louis Quinze period among the giant standard-roses, the " torches of perfume," planted by his late brother-in-law, Félicien Rops. Maeterlinck is agitated, distracted. A dire calamity must have brought him, evidently! But what is it? . . . He has discovered an anachronism in his friend's work. Among the host of flowers that defiles through his pages, a long procession of colours and fragrances, Demolder, conscientious and careful as he was, had included the dahlia! Now the dahlia was still unknown under the reign of the Pompadour or rather of Louis-the-too-loving. . . . What a disaster! . . . So we see Maeterlinck insisting on the author's instantly destroying the whole edition of the novel

defaced by this insignificant blot and having another printed! . . . He would have done it himself, be sure of that, in the other's place. . . .

The truth is, a mind of a very positive cast, apt to comprehend, verify, and define the most concrete realities, is the complement of this brain teeming with visions. By the lucidity of his style and the force or brilliance of his figures, he can almost always succeed in materialising, making in some sort palpable, his purest abstractions. And I think I may repeat here what I have written elsewhere—he carves his dreams in marble and casts clouds in bronze. How did men fail, once the *Princesse Maleine* had appeared, to divine in the author of that "nightmare in dialogue" the stuff of a dramatic artist who should one day write works as "stageable," as well fitted to the comprehension of the masses, as *Monna*

Vanna? No, all the public saw in it—and the Ghent public in particular—was a scheme, cleverly carried out, to provoke "a new shudder" by methods too far-fetched, effects too puerile, to be fit for anything better than the theatre of marionettes their inspired fellow-citizen had modestly dreamt of as their setting. Yet all the while the gifts of a writer for the stage capable, if he chose, of the most vigorous realism, were staring them in the face. These broken words of horror, these terrifying reservations, these muttered presentiments, are life itself. It was so, beyond a doubt, the participators in the sombre mystery that sealed the fates of the Archduke Rudolf, of the Baronne Vescera, of the Princess Stéphanie, shuddered and whispered, in the tragic forest of Meyerling; it was no otherwise sinister shadows went and came, exchanging breathless confidences and feverish

ejaculations, in that infamous night of the Konak, whose darkness was to be reddened with the blood of Alexander and Draga and swallow up a dynasty for ever. What constitutes a profound difference between Maeterlinck and Shakespeare, to whom the critics have so strangely claimed kinship for him, in connection with the *Princesse Maleine*, is this: to the characters the Swan of Avon conducts through a series of catastrophes and crimes he lends his own powers of psychological analysis, the running commentary of his philosophy, in the flood-tide of an eloquence whereof he is himself the inexhaustible fountain. Very often—I dare to say so at the risk of being accused of paradox—it is the Shakespearean creations that seem sublime marionettes; for one mind only, and one voice only, which is not their own, animates them almost all—the overflowing mind of their creator, the voice of his

abounding genius. Whereas, in this, the earliest of Maeterlinck's works, the victims or the instruments of Fate are individualised types—of duplicity, like the vile and hypocritical Queen of Jutland ; of candour and instinctive impulse, like Maleine, her betrothed, her nurse, or the little Alban. The author leaves them the language of their rank, their age, their passions, their emotions, without intruding himself. They only say just what they should say, and exactly what they would say, if you supposed them of flesh and blood confronting actual events. And never, perhaps, will author show himself so entirely master of the synthetic faculty—essence of the normal stage—as does Maeterlinck in this same *Princesse Maleine*, so often perversely represented by superficial critics as a twofold defiance, a challenge to common sense and a challenge to dramatic conventions. To prove our

contention, it is enough to follow, closely and without prejudice, old King Hjalmar through his fits of anguish and hesitation, his bursts of indignation and remorse, the rages and dotings of this greybeard lured into guilty complicities by a senile passion against which his conscience and what of reason is left him struggle in vain. All the sumptuous rhetoric of the speeches wherein King Lear's madness and despair are poured forth tell us less of his character and distraught intellect, and tell it in a less convincing fashion, than the brief phrases, the frantic ejaculations, which translate each convulsion of old Hjalmar's soul, like lightning flashes that search out and illumine one after another all quarters of the night sky. What we might perhaps find to blame in Maeterlinck is, rather than any element of the artificial or supernatural, an excessive fidelity, verging on the phonographic and

MME. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK IN THE PART OF "MONNA VANNA"

photographic, to the voice of Nature and the brutality of the naked truth. Never did culprit, writhing under the double torment—of fear his crime will be discovered combined with a restless craving to see the secret divulged that is stifling him—bear himself or express himself otherwise than this "King of a part of Holland" after the strangling of the Princess Maleine. Great fun was made, at the original performances, of the concluding words of the play, particularly of Hjalmar's question to the nurse: "Will there be salad for breakfast?" I ask what other sort of outpouring could the most exacting amateur of "slices of life" have wished for better to betray the final catastrophe, final and complete, of a dulled, stupefied septuagenarian's brain—an old man whose whole world has sunk round him into rack and ruin amid hate and blood and death? . . .

By way of supplement to the present monograph, I reprint below the *Massacre des Innocents* (The Massacre of the Innocents), the first pages of Maeterlinck's prose ever printed, and which have become almost unprocurable, having first seen the light in 1886, signed *Mooris* Maeterlinck, in the *Pleïade*, the review founded by him, Grégoire Le Roy, and some young French revolutionaries of literature; it only appeared six times, after counting in all eighteen subscribers. It was Grégoire Le Roy who read the piece in manuscript to a small Parisian coterie, who were instantly inspired with such enthusiasm that they resolved there and then on its publication in the *Pleïade*, not yet born.[1]

[1] The *Massacre des Innocents* appeared as the first article in the third number of the review, followed by verses by Jean Ajalbert, Ed. Bailly, and P. Quillard, a study by Rodolphe Dargens on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, &c. Subsequently there appeared at Brussels another *Pléiade*, in which Maeterlinck published his

Read this curious and deliciously naïve Flemish rendering, " a la Pieter Breughel," of the Gospel legend. Under the pen of the young author, even more than under the brush of the old Flemish master, the Herodian myth has become a reality, or at any rate something startlingly like reality, by dint of minuteness of description—natural touches glimpsed, detail by detail, and scrupulously reproduced. Seldom has a purely imaginative narrative been given such a " body," impressed with such movement, inspired with such stirring life.

Thus we see in this anchorite of thought lurks a stalwart and entirely modern athlete; in this simple-hearted mystic, a sedulous and clear-headed man of science; in this explorer of the catacombs of the

first piece of criticism, devoted to the *Damnation de l'Artiste* of that powerful and profound poet Iwan Gilkin.

soul, this lover of the riddles of a higher world, a keen observer and the most precise interpreter—if he chooses—of present and visible humanity. He possesses the two faculties, mutually incompatible, of moving at ease in the clouds, and, if his fancy bids, in the crowds. And the longer he lives, doubtless we shall have more and more occasion to realise the fact. What I mean when I say his mental bias is away from normal regions, towards the abysses and mountain-peaks where some hope to encounter the Unknown and tear the mask from its face, is that he dwells there by choice and as it were habitually, because they are the true and natural element of his being. We go through life, all of us, like people who have been led blindfolded to a railroad train and locked in a carriage; they are not told their destination, simply assured that the journey will be a short one. But

while many of us stare out of window and are absorbed in the spectacle of the countries we traverse, many others concern themselves solely with their comfort and amusement on the road—drinking, eating, talking, swearing, singing, sleeping. And only some few, who hold themselves apart, buried in their thoughts, only scan the void from time to time to strive and guess whence they come and whither this brief run at railway speed will take them. Maeterlinck is of the last sort. If he scrutinises and questions, with a sometimes burning curiosity and the most penetrating eye, the sights that defile past him, it is not as things important in themselves—they are for him but momentary apparitions and flying shows—but simply as tokens, symbols, marks, traces, available to help towards the solution of the agonising and all-important question: "What mystery have we left behind us?

To what mystery shall we come at the end of the day's journey ? " What meets the eye represents only an infinitesimal fragment of time and space, and interests him solely in virtue of its possible relations with them. He describes it and defines it like a master, when it strikes him as worth his while, because he is endowed with a masterly range of vision and masterly powers of expression. But his mind is nearly always travelling elsewhere, at an incalculable distance from the iron road and his visible horizon.

* * * * *

When account has been duly taken of this mental attitude, we can appreciate the error, not always disinterested, into which sundry biographers have fallen who have attributed such or such a religious belief to him, have assigned him to such or such a school of philosophers. For instance, after his translation with notes

of the *Noces Spirituelles de Ruysbroeck*, a study was published on him wherein the author proclaimed him the living realisation of Barbey d'Aurévilly's prediction: "The next great poet will be a man of Faith."

Details even were given. Maeterlinck was going to be the continuer of Ruysbroeck l'Admirable, "obedient servant of the Christ, lively member of Holy Church," that is to say of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. No doubt the drawer of this horoscope could plead in excuse a brief confession of faith let fall by Maeterlinck himself at the end of a preface, and indeed repeated a little later in the *Trésor des Humbles* (The Treasure of the Humble), before being implicitly but clearly repudiated in the Introduction to his *Théâtre*, in *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (Wisdom and Destiny), as well as elsewhere. But nowadays, when we have

a copious and superb output of work giving full information regarding the quality of Maeterlinck's intellect, the absurdity is self-evident of the Catholic label or any other label applied to the conscience of so objective a thinker. For one who travels the immensity of time and space in quest of truths hid in the deepest and furthest recesses of the psychical world, what weight of conviction can belong to any one or other of the hundred different religions, to such or such of the thousand rival dogmas, which succeed one another or co-exist, fighting amongst themselves for the approval of mankind, according to the exigencies of environment, the prejudices of the age, the fashion of the moment? It is as if, on the figurative railway journey I spoke of just now, the bewildered traveller who sees turn and turn about Gothic spires, Byzantine domes, profiles of Protestant chapels or

Jewish synagogues, pagodas or pyramids, made a definite pronouncement amongst them all and exclaimed: "There, *that* for certain is the architecture of the whole world, the one style that suits all latitudes." But if he is, like Maeterlinck, a conscientious and patient inquirer, harassed by all the anxieties of sincere doubt, he will cease, after the first few hours in the train, to draw any deduction whatever from so many discrepant forms—except that mankind is divided into a host of fractions that have not themselves succeeded, after centuries and centuries of endeavour and controversy, in agreeing upon any single type of sanctuary wherein to house a sublime dream common to all. In other words, an intellect such as Maeterlinck's could only make halt for a moment—in the first stage of the journey—before such or such of the innumerable religions built up by our ignorance and superstition on

the foundation of our wishes for self-satisfaction. Granting his mind dallied a while with the naked dogma of some great mystic potentiality, it was bound inevitably to end in the quasi-pantheism of Spinozism, which seems to be the form in which it tends to express itself at the present time.

But again, is this its final word? . . . Its very honesty and independence might sanction any abjuration or any conversion. When this indefatigable reaper in the field of hypotheses shall have gathered in all his harvest, who can tell what philosophical or ethical formula will prove the net result of his discoveries and his impressions as a whole, or even if there will be any net result? . . . He is no dogmatiser, no man of systems. He delves the under-soil, he questions the stars; he moves forward amid the countless uncertainties and contradictions of things,

issuing no authoritative decisions, merely giving for what they are worth his marvellous interpretations, which vary with the changing and Sibylline answers of the oracles consulted. If the limits of this monograph allowed, copious quotations might be brought in evidence to show that Maeterlinck is possessed by the true scientific spirit—the spirit that does not seek, like the traditional religions, to create a reputation for itself of inflexibility and infallibility, certifying the uncertain and striving to adjust the facts or supposed facts to theories, but which plainly states difficulties and loyally constrains theories to bend humbly before the phenomena that prove them untenable or doubtful. And this is why so many biographers, incompetent to delimit the frontiers of a mentality so supple and so broad as his, make it the daughter and disciple of such a host of different

philosophers or metaphysicians. What descendant of the Crusaders can boast a genealogy as long and varied as the lineage they assign to the author of the *Sagesse et la Destinée* (Wisdom and Destiny) and the *Temple Enseveli* (The Buried Temple)? If in literature he has been found to bear a family likeness now to Marlowe, now to Webster, now to Shakespeare, to Edgar Allan Poe, to Baudelaire, to Jules Laforgue, to Ibsen, in the domain of transcendentalism he has been affiliated successively to Plotinus, Ruysbroeck, Mme. Guyon, Emerson, Fénelon, Swedenborg, Novalis, Carlyle, Goethe, and Schopenhauer; the experts in psychological decipherment have discovered a relationship between him and the great Stoic, Marcus Aurelius, while he has been quite commonly made the descendant of illustrious pre-Christian sages—Socrates and Plato amongst others, pending the day when some far-seeing

mortal discerns his cousinship with the authors of the Rig-Veda, remote from us by some forty or fifty centuries!

He would not himself deny that he owes something of his original development to all these precursors and many others into the bargain. The law of atavism is grotesquely limited in its pretensions of to-day. A wit has defined it thus: "The art of saddling our misdeeds on our grand-parents." Ugolino's sons are avenged! . . . Every man nowadays devours his father for the good repute of his son. . . . We should be more just, and recognise that, over and above their material goods, our ancestors bequeath us everything—their qualities along with their defects, their knowledge with their errors, their beauty with their blemishes; and that if the fairest part of the heritage sometimes remains unseen, it is because the heirs have squandered it. Let us go

still further, and proclaim that, far from being a mere matter of consanguinity, heredity is of universal application in the sphere of ideas and emotions; that is to say that each individual benefits or suffers, in divers degrees, by reason of the sensibility, the experience, the virtues, and the vices of all the thousands of millions of individuals that have gone before.

"There is not a gesture, a thought, a sin, a tear, or an atom of acquired conscience that is ever lost in the bowels of the earth; at the most insignificant of our acts our ancestors revive, not in their graves, where they never stir more, but deep in ourselves, where they are still and always alive."

So speaks Maeterlinck in person in the Preface to his *Théâtre*. Elsewhere he says, in terms I cannot exactly recall, that the most illiterate peasant of to-day can feel unconsciously the influence of the

most ancient and learned thinkers and think like them, the spiritual air we all breathe being made up of all the breaths of the human spirit, from the drawing of its first sigh.

A fortiori must the past have served to leave its mark on the brain, to guide the soul, of a student whose reading has led him to the very fountain-head of the loftiest speculations, and made him live in some sort side by side, under the same illumination, with all the mystics and philosophers whose heir he is alleged to be. In his thirst to know and understand, Maeterlinck has had the patience to decipher the Old Flemish Ruysbroeck spoke in the fourteenth century and the extinct idiom which Chaucer used in England at the same date. He has surmounted the disheartening difficulties of the language of Plotinus and his hazy translations. No hieroglyphic that would bar his way

towards the light could stop him. More than any one, therefore, he is steeped in ancestrality; and we are not so far out after all when we point to such and such a feature, simple or superstitious, of his physiognomy that recalls the Quietism of primitive ages; such and such accents of wisdom that seem a repetition of the grave, calm voice of the ancient Stoics; such and such tones, perturbed or joyful, wherein rings the echo, now of the philosophies in revolt against all tradition, now of the cheeriest optimisms. But where we deceive ourselves, I think, is when, in a foolish mania for classification, we imprison him within one positive and final system, confine him to one definite school of ideology—this mind whose very probity has debarred it hitherto from any irrevocable conclusion, and would give it the courage to accept any and every phase of self-evolution.

No unalterable doctrine so far emerges from Maeterlinck's work: "Let us not frame laws out of a few fragments picked up in the dark that encompasses our thoughts." It is himself who speaks thus by the mouth of Merlin in *Joyzelle*. Edison of the immaterial world, ever on the march towards new enlightenments, where and when will he stop? . . . Doubtless he does not know himself. All we can affirm with assurance is that the sombre, narrow conception that belonged to his youth and sounded through his earliest works like groans of a homesick exile, or like gnashings of teeth at the portal of the dark cavern of the problems that transcend humanity,[1] has won to a

[1] Re-read, in particular, the *Serres Chaudes*, from which I pick at random, by way of example, the following stanzas headed *Désirs d'Hivers*:

"Je pleurs les lèvres fanées
Où les baisers ne sont pas nés

clearer vision, as the eye always does when it grows accustomed little by little even to the thickest obscurity. If the certainties formulated by the Churches have endured with him only so long as was needed for a powerful intelligence to unlearn the lessons of the nursery or the Jesuit school, the doubts that succeeded have lost almost all their sting. No longer does he

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Et les désirs abandonnés
Sous les tristesses moissonnées.

Toujours la pluie à l'horizon !
Toujours la neige sur les grèves !
Tandis qu'au seuil clos de nos rêves,
Des loups couchés sur le gazon,

Observent en mon âme lasse,
Les yeux ternis dans le passé,
Tout le sang autrefois versé
Des agneaux mourant sur la glace.

Seule la lune éclaire enfin
De sa tristesse monotone,
Où gèle l'herbe de l'automne,
Mes désirs malades de faim."

see men as poor corks drifted on the waters, or as "precarious and haphazard gleams exposed, without appreciable purpose, to all the blasts of an unheeding night." He inclines to-day to concede a share in shaping our fate to our will; the irresistible occult power he once saw everywhere plays henceforth a less dominant and less ferocious rôle in our lives; or at the worst, it may possibly be curbed, and in any case it is well not to surrender and submit, "because what constitutes its strength is perhaps the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be hypnotised by it." This half retractation of fatalism he has himself made in the Preface to his *Théâtre*. And even had he *not* made it, the long step from the pitiful and passive little Maleine or the lifeless Seven Princesses to the proud, energetic, at times imperious Monna Vanna, to say nothing of the heroine of *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*,

would sufficiently imply it.[1] It gives the measure of the long road Maeterlinck has travelled in reflection and observation, and the vast advance these qualities are capable of in the future. Amplifying, broadening every day, like the style in which it is embodied, his thought runs on indefatigably, more and more tending to overpass the rudimentary conception that represents our life as a mere dream between two eternities of sleep, and cherishing more and more the hope of glimpsing other horizons behind the twofold negation which *appears* to bound the cradle and the grave. It states nothing categorically, it is liable to hark back upon itself, to return to disheartening hypotheses—witness the passage in the *Oiseau Bleu* (The Blue Bird) I have alluded to on an early

[1] Madame Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck has noted admirably this transformation of the heroines of the great writer in a series of lectures which would surely merit publication.

page of this study. Yet it seeks to confirm the most enlightening conjectures, and it is seconded in this effort after optimism by a genuine love for our poor, blind, distracted species, by the longing some feel, not for themselves only, but for all, to be able to reveal bright and happy perspectives before men's eyes, weary of hermetic obscurities and agonising mysteries.

It may well be, as has been suggested, that Maeterlinck's imagination has thus "been coloured as with a new dayspring by a great domestic happiness." The man would cease to be a man whom everything personally delectable or deplorable could befall without his outlook being affected. The simplest souls who have sung of love in the most commonplace strains have laid down a law that admits of no exception, declaring it tricks out the universe "with a quite new brilliance" in the eyes of the couples it

makes one. True, this is over private a subject to be dragged into a biographical study, so private I should have refrained from even hinting at it, if it were allowable, in face of an individuality such as Maeterlinck's, to neglect any one of the factors which may have been concerned in his mental orientation. The truth is, "the chosen one whom destiny holds in reserve for us all," and who one day entered into Maeterlinck's life to blend in unison with it—I need not say I mean the consummate artist Georgette Leblanc—has certainly availed to help on the change of direction in his thoughts. "It is," writes the author of the *Trésor des Humbles* (The Treasure of the Humble) himself, in an "Essay on Women," "it is by their side especially that one has at times a momentary but distinct presentiment of a life that does not seem always to run parallel with the life of appearances." Again,

further on : " Who knows if the man who has not reposed on a woman's heart will ever have the precise sentiment of the future ? " Not only was Mme. Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck to adorn her husband's life and impregnate the atmosphere about him with the most decorative element, as the photographs bear witness representing the Abbey of St. Wandrille and the Quatre Chemins with the owners included in the picture ; but the chosen helpmeet of the great thinker was almost certain to react on the impressionable part of his nature, seeing she is herself an intelligence competent to bestow, in exchange for what she receives, all that a man of supreme attainment can ask of a woman adequately gifted to reach his level, to talk to him, to understand him and interpret his creations—Mélisande, Ariane, Joyzelle, Monna Vanna—with so much genius, so much sympathy, as of an

inspired priestess of his art, that he may well end by believing them to have been modelled on her rather than merely incarnated by her.[1] But who shall estimate precisely the part played by each particular impression, each particular circumstance, in the delicate labour of a brain and a soul perpetually at grips with the secrets of the Infinite, the Intangible, what the writer has himself called "the Unthinkable"! And what matter to sum up to a fraction the total, greater or less, of gratitude we owe to the woman who, by associating her life with that of a poet or a philosopher, has contributed by her grace and her share of sensibility

[1] The portraits accompanying the text show Mme. Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck in some of these rôles. They bring out the intensity and variety of expression of a physiognomy which sounds the whole gamut of the emotions expressed in the author's work: unspeakable terror, mystic ecstasy, smiling defiance, fierce resolve, a child's exuberant joy.

to his happiness, his serenity, and in consequence to the directions his work takes! Enough here to verify results! Henceforth Maeterlinck looks with eyes infinitely less despairing and even less fearful at the eternal problem of our being, its antecedents, its final end. Whether or no, in whole or in part, this is the premeditated or unconscious work of a human good fairy, it proves in any case that the most spiritual of the writers of our time is not the proud apostle of an inflexible theory, but a sincere searcher after truth, tolerant of suggestions, explicit or unspoken, that can throw light on his road; so richly gifted with knowledge and divination as to realise that no man is adequately so by himself. A phenomenon infinitely rare, and that justifies us in hoping everything from the efforts of so earnest an explorer of the sub-consciousness to arrive at some oasis of certainty where we should

feel something better than shifting sands beneath our feet.

Yet why labour the point? I am of those who think that if Religion promises us heaven, it is Woman who gives it us . . . the perfect woman, indispensable complement of the other half of creation, she whose flesh is only the envelope of a soul every whit as captivating, she who awakes and rouses to utterance what lay asleep in us, waiting her summons, and but for her would never have shaken off its cataleptic trance. But to insist on generalising from the particular case of a poetical pair, brought together it may be by instinct and welded by a common ideal of art, would be to risk falling into the puerile error of the traveller who declared the women of Andulusia were all blondes, because he had seen one such. . . . Enough. . . .

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In any case we need fear no serious contradiction if we claim for the author of *La Sagesse et la Destinée* (Wisdom and Destiny), *Le Temple Enseveli* (The Buried Temple), *La Vie des Abeilles* (The Life of the Bee), *L'Intelligence des Fleurs* (The Intelligence of Flowers) this further superiority over the great majority of speculative or natural philosophers, perhaps over all—a style magic in its limpid beauty, a poetry of conception and expression that invests with a supreme charm the harshest and most arid of subjects. It is by pleasant paths, deliciously embosomed in flowers and full of shade, or gloriously sunlit, that Maeterlinck leads us forward to the " craggy pinnacles of the brain," the precipices of thought. Wherever he carries us, we know beforehand it will be enchanted ground. The obscurity and dryness of the majority, whether of mystics or men of science, repel almost everybody outside

the circle of official mandarins, with the result that their teaching is hardly transmitted at all except by the tradition of the schools. We admire them from afar, on trust or hearsay, but we leave them strictly alone, fearing to be disillusioned or bored to death; whereas an ever-lengthening procession of delighted readers attends Maeterlinck everywhere. Can you name another writer who, like him, has learnt the way, or knows it without learning, to adorn with tropes at once so sober and so persuasive the pages of a work of erudition; to present abstractions in a diction so clear and so harmonious; to clothe in so pure an alabaster the phantoms of dreamland? At first glance it seems a paradox, an impossible combination of elements, radically incompatible. By a sort of concession to our sense of justice, Nature generally refuses to bestow such a plurality of gifts. Enough for Apollo to

MME. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK IN "ARIANE AND BARBE-BLEUE"

incarnate poetic eloquence; she does not lodge beneath his Olympian brow the wisdom of Minerva, any more than she sets in the hands of Pallas Athene the melodious lyre of the minstrel god, whatever mythology may say. When, by inadvertence, she *has* conjoined in one and the same being two faculties so contradictory as those of instructing and intoxicating, she often hastens to nullify the privilege by causing one of the two gifts to weaken or atrophy the other. The striking phenomenon about Maeterlinck is the co-existence in him of both attributes in common accord, so blended as to make no longer two, but one. Never does the poet in him abdicate in favour of the observer of concrete reality, never does the man of science sacrifice to the poet one particle of his spoil. We feel he has two wings when he walks the earth, and a solid body when his wings bear us aloft through

the air. And what a boon for all! The serious teachings of so deep an intellect entering the most rebellious ears thanks to the witcheries of metaphor and the blandishments of well-ordered diction; art imposing its charm, weaving its spell, over the sternest savants by reason of the positive truths he clothes in his seductive phrases. What need to seek other explanation of the extraordinary vogue of Maeterlinck's works? In any case, the prodigious number of translations of his books, the ease with which they are transposed into all languages, and especially the German and Slavonic idioms, does not solely testify to Maeterlinck's intellectual affinity with the Northern peoples, of whose torturing curiosity in face of the supreme riddle Hamlet is the embodiment. No; like the goblet modelled on Cleopatra's bosom, it attests likewise the pure perfection of the form that serves as

mould for these world-wide reproductions. For so many adequate replicas, it needed the same consummate model as, for instance, rendered Greek tragedy and Greek sculpture accessible to all nations and appreciable in all ages.

In the beginning few foresaw the style, with its full and grandiose periods, yet without a trace of declamatory over-emphasis, that was to mature in the hands of the author of the *Princesse Maleine* and *Les Aveugles.* Some criticised him as the inventor of the monosyllabic drama, a drama "without words" they even said, hardly better than pantomime; and they little thought to see a later day when others, on the contrary, would reproach him with a prose of such richness as sometimes to ring in the ears with the noble but monotonous cadence of the Alexandrine. It was because none had diagnosed with close enough care the temperament of a writer

whose first dramatic efforts, in their odd conciseness, so startling because so unexpected, hid so many secret reservations, such riches confined for the moment between low, insignificant banks. In reality, the ample scope of Maeterlinck's diction should have struck any heedful observer the moment he broke off for the first time composing dialogue for characters to speak on the stage to fall into monologue of his own, that is from the day he wrote the introductions to the *Disciples â Saïs* and the *Ornement des Noces Spirituelles*. Thenceforth it began to move forward in proud and sounding waves like those of an unconfined sea. By a natural development, Maeterlinck's phraseology has gone on since to further gains in breadth and freedom, like the ocean whose billows roll unchecked by the propinquity of any shore; but he had within him from the very first all the elements of its magnificent

maturity. Moreover, the writer has always remained true to himself, as the thinker has never ceased to follow up his first lines of thought. Many of his friends, when he quitted Belgium for Paris, trembled to think that his genius, so essentially personal, might bend to the exigencies of an alien taste, might be modified by contact with a different race and fall under its spell. They wronged him by their fears. Maeterlinck has conquered his high renown without the smallest deviation from his own mental individuality or his manner of expressing it to others. Paris was never able to *parisianise* him. He declared one day to a very eminent impresario and actor [1] who wanted to induce him to adapt his philosophical fairy drama, the *Oiseau Bleu* (The Blue Bird), to the taste of a boulevard public :

[1] The late Coquelin Ainé is referred to.

"I would sooner fling my manuscript in the fire."

Indeed, *could* he have bent his art, even had he wished, to meet the exigencies of a public which demands as the first essential of a fairy drama something fantastic, diverting? Thinking of Maeterlinck transplanted into the burning fiery furnace of contemporary French literature, so powerful and so infectious, and yet remaining absolutely faithful to himself, thanks to the independence of his character, the force of his personality, and the saving grace of his self-isolation, I cannot help drawing a parallel from the legend of Siegfried, the young, untamed giant, led safe by his virgin vigour to Brunhild's arms through the fearsome lights and red flames of the bale-fire. Even so the author's individuality has marched on unscathed through all the perils of expatriation to the heights of victory.

What may well surprise us *à priori*, is the melodious quality of the style in one so insusceptible as Maeterlinck to the art of the Glucks, Rameaus, Beethovens, Wagners. His intimates know by his own admission that he was always incapable of the delights of the opera and the lyrical drama. They stir no chord in him. It is the sole mode of expression that remains impenetrable to him, that he has felt no desire to penetrate. He has never found it possible to interest himself even in the musical versions of his own works; and I am betraying an open secret when I say that it is Mme. Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck who has always studied—having at his service the gift he lacks—and judged the quality of the scores offered as polyphonic interpretations of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, *Ariane et Barbe Bleue*, or *Monna Vanna*. But is not this seeming paradox of Maeterlinck's

deafness to music a direct effect of the laws of physiological equilibrium? Our author is so unceasingly a musician in his prose! . . . It may be his prose has absorbed all the sensibility of his auditory faculties, and how should any be left over to taste the pleasures of song and symphony? A question of general import, and one which invites another of no less interest.

What do we want with voice and orchestra as accompaniments to dramatic works such as *Monna Vanna*, in which treasures of harmonious eloquence are lavished so generously? Is not music[1] an excrescence when it sets itself in juxtaposition with a drama which, without it, already would seem to have afforded

[1] Of course there is no question here of appreciating the intrinsic value of M. Février's score, which we are bound, in common justice, to commend for its discretion, the sort of deferential attitude it adopts to the play.

to ear and brain the maximum of enjoyment they are capable of? Is not music in that case assuming the rather presumptuous pose of an aviator who should offer the assistance of his flying machine to some eagle of the upper air? I put the question; I leave it to others to answer.

It is a field of discussion on which partisans and opponents of the supremacy of music will yet perhaps have occasion to meet time and again in consequence of those disputes between the great Flemish writer and his lyrical collaborators or commentators which have made such a noise. The quarrels I allude to may have given the public an unfavourable idea of the celebrated author's temper. But for those who know him, he is the most equable being in the world; few men could be found so deliberate, so much masters of themselves, so little subject to

noisy, disputatious fits of passion, so inclined by temperament to an easy, philosophic tolerance. The most part of the Belgian littérateurs deem him very unlike themselves, who by tradition and choice hold aloof from the domain of speculation and abstract thought which is his, and are pre-eminently painters of material and plastic life, lineal descendants of Rubens, Teniers, Baron Leys—palettes transmuted into inkstands. Yet for all this, Maeterlinck has kept, in character no less than in physique, the impress of his Flemish stock, and this great-great-grandson of Van Artevelde, once firmly convinced of the justice of his case, has brought to the defence of his rights the inflexible perseverance, the "gentle obstinacy," which characterises all the more cultivated Flemings and degenerates into brutality and violence in those of the inferior classes. In his frequent conflicts

Les Quatre Chemins, Grasse
The Garden.

with his musicians no doubt he deemed himself to be championing a sacred principle in claiming for the writer's wishes and way of looking at things an unqualified respect on the part of the composer whose assistance was invoked. Starting from this fatherly solicitude for a babe he cannot bear to see tricked out by strangers to further their own ends and gratify their own whim, the man of genius, his Flemish soul set firm as a rock, fights his hardest to have his will prevail, with the one object of satisfying his sense of justice, even though convinced from the first of the futility of his efforts to win any immediate or proximate advantage. But in this there is no love of chicane, no trace of vulgar resentment. Those who think otherwise have never come close to the man or studied the psychology of his race—the same sort who instruct the Parisians that Maeterlinck is

pronounced *Meterlingue*, and would be much surprised to learn that, according to the phonetic laws of the land to which the author of *Monna Vanna* belongs by birth, we must pronounce *Mātterli-nk*, dividing the last syllable in two instead of treating it as a diphthong. Nor is there any real contradiction between this obstinacy of the poet where certain things touching his work are involved and the philosophical pliability of mind which has allowed him to write in the *Temple Enseveli* (Buried Temple), perhaps thinking of his early tendencies as a Catholic :

" We ought never to regret the hours when a noble-seeming belief abandons us. A faith that fades, a spring that breaks, a dominant idea that dominates us no more, because we think to dominate it instead, this proves that we are alive, that we are on the forward march, that

we are discarding many things, because we are not standing stock-still."

Maeterlinck has not discarded, has not lost his faith in the superior rights of the author over those of an artist intervening subsequently to educe a musical effect from his work. Whence the inflexibility of his attitude of resistance towards pretensions of a contrary nature. But even should this go against the unity of the portrait here sketched, what would it matter? No man is made all of a piece. The least complex are full of complexities; and an unexpected and inexplicable disaccord is often manifest between their acts of yesterday and their acts of to-day, nay, between their acts and their words of the same moment. Let us look to the grand total of sincerity. It is through insisting on being, or appearing, logical, without taking account of the endlessly fluctuating diversity of types and circumstances,

that men end in pretence, artifice, falsehood, like those naïve writers of pre-realistic fiction who, for symmetry's sake, divided up mankind into two sharply contrasted categories of impeccable angels and downright devils. And is not one of the qualities we have extolled in Maeterlinck precisely this moral integrity that allows him to go back on himself, to give the lie direct to his own logic, and would urge him to admit instantly and unhesitatingly, if it was proved to him, that two and two do not make four, when nine-tenths of mankind, through force of habit and a shamefaced fear of contradicting themselves, would argue to the last ditch that two and two make five, if that was the lesson the schoolmaster had impressed on their childish ignorance.

* * * * *

The most flagrant discrepancy, however, to be found in the author of the

Vie des Abeilles (Life of the Bee), is that existing between his way of living and his work, between his mode of existence and his public career. It is barely possible to conceive a man of simpler and less pedantic manners than this learned scholar; an individual less fluent and more timid than this copious writer who, pen in hand, expresses himself with so sure and authoritative a confidence; habits more placid and unpretending than those of the triumphant poet and philosopher, environed, nevertheless, with so radiant a prestige. It is the foible of some great artists to wish not only to be but to appear unlike other people, and to underline their intellectual or æsthetic originality by the singularity of their behaviour and the eccentricity of their costume—or shall we say stage costume. Maeterlinck never condescended to these little tricks—to oblige biographers hungering after picturesque detail. It is

beneath the simple exterior of a country gentleman, strong-backed, square-shouldered, of a rather ponderous build as befits his Flemish origin, that Nature has enshrined the fair jewels of his brain and soul—as it were in a stout metal coffer that would be much like any other, were it not for two little windows let into the lid which give a glimpse of sparkling treasures within, and which are the writer's two eyes, glowing finely with an inward light reflected by the pupils. Nor has the poet modified in the slightest this outward semblance of a stout, healthy countryman. He dresses to suit plain, practical requirements, without the least elaboration. You would not know him from the first chauffeur you might meet, as his automobile spins along the verdant banks of the Lower Seine, or in winter by the azure shores of the Mediterranean; you would take him for the most prosaic

of working gardeners if you saw him, a coarse apron round his waist and an old felt on his head, looking after some favourite plant in the flower-beds of St. Wandrille or of the Quatre Chemins at Grasse. No man should find it easier to gratify his love of isolation; even in the midst of crowds, he would readily pass unnoticed, so inconspicuous his garb, so entire the absence of assumption or affectation in his bearing. He wears no strange amulet, he lets his hair grow or turn grey as it lists, he eats and drinks like everybody else—save making, as a man ever curious to experiment, an occasional trial of vegetarianism. He breathes an atmosphere of such resolute and reasonable calm that the photographers might try in vain to catch on his features, at the climax of his profoundest reveries, that look of heaven-sent inspiration which the camera almost always bestows on men lifted by

their achievement or their aspirations above the common level. The sort of unassuming incognito this disdain of posing secures him is further safeguarded by the look of health that mantles his face, which is full-featured and perfectly regular, without a trace of the morbid wear and tear that furrows the ivory-white brows of so many men of letters. There is nothing austere or crabbed in this explorer of the sub-consciousness, in these eyes that scrutinise the boundless immensity of the unknown. The myth of Prometheus and his liver devoured by a vulture, for having tried to rob the heavens, is doubtless an irony, a symbol implying that sacrilegious curiosity has its penalty —in bilious complaints! It is falsified in Maeterlinck's case by a placid, good-natured air such as any country landowner might wear without an anxiety beyond the kennels and the quarterly

ST. WANDRILLE
The vestibule and stairs which led to the monks' cells.

payment of his farm-rents. None of the stigmata of asceticism mark this cenobite, who now spends all the fine season of the year with Mme. Georgette Leblanc-Maeterlinck, a secretary and two or three servants, on the estate, covering some 35 acres, of St. Wandrille, amid the silent spaciousness of a building so vast that it used to shelter 400 Benedictines in days when the monks of France had no reasons to quit their country. In winter it is a smaller and daintier residence altogether —the house where Fernand Xau, formerly Director of the *Journal*, died—that the great author occupies, at the Quatre Chemins, near Grasse. There, beneath smiling pergolas *à l'Italienne*, he has established another inviolable and unviolated retreat, never visited save by the breath of the mistral laden with the scent of millions of flowers, that encircle it with the fragrant caresses of an Earthly

Paradise. There, as in the Monastery of St. Wandrille, where his books are wrought amid the wondrous relics of thirteen centuries of architecture and history and an idyllic luxuriance of trees and lawns, it is still the same unostentatious existence, without parade and without oddity, sedately ordered as that of any middle-class home. He lives of deliberate purpose for himself, and not for an audience of gaping groundlings, hungry for fantastic eccentricities.

Early to bed—after the reading of some masterpiece or a bout of homely, merry talk—and early to rise is the rule at St. Wandrille. Everything is done quietly; there is no hurry or scurry or visible effort. Unlike so many other dramatists, Maeterlinck does not "speak" his productions before putting pen to paper, to try the anticipated effect; they bud and burgeon silently within him, like a fruit

ripening to maturity before it may be plucked; the words are there, the sentences flow freely, and are written out almost without erasure, directly he sits down at a table to transcribe the work of the brain ready for the typewriter, who might almost be dispensed with, so legible is his manuscript.[1] He imposes no regular daily stint on himself, but leaves inspiration and reflection to do their work, as the fruit-tree lets sun and wind and rain do theirs. . . . If need be, his pen will lie idle for weeks together; but he will never suffer social obligations, unforeseen interruptions of daily life, to interfere with the meditation which supplies the material for his pen. He only skims

[1] An exception must be made in the case of the adverbs. Their length seems to get on his nerves suddenly. He seldom writes them to the end; he contracts and cuts them down—"merveill . . ." for "merveilleusement," "tranquil . . ." for "tranquillement."

cursorily through the papers—just enough the better to enjoy the peace of his Thebaïd by catching a momentary echo of the roar of cities and the far-away strifes of men,—excludes the interviewer as rigorously nowadays as of old, receives no visitors save a few intimate and trusty friends at long intervals—Quatre Chemins has only one, the friend of his heart—and carefully eliminates all obligations to compromise his day's work by the tyranny of necessary correspondence. His letters to his friends are tenderly affectionate; on occasion they are lit up with a flash of sarcastic humour; and even when they deal with quite commonplace topics, the style always has the same fine, bold movement the public relishes in his books—which proves how inherent it is in him, particularly if we compare the dry, colourless missives of not a few writers of repute, who, whether from indolence,

avarice, or indigence, never display their talents except in print.[1] At the same time these letters of Maeterlinck's are invariably short, and strictly limited to the question in hand. They have not, like the lengthy and elegant correspondence of Mme. de Sévigné or Barbey d'Aurévilly, been premeditated, starched and ironed, for posterity. Here we see plainly the habits of the methodical thinker, who would find it irksome to have his thoughts distracted from the main object and dissipated in useless expenditure of energy and superfluous task-work. In the same way he sets his face against the importunities of friends who ask him to write on special themes, demanding a preface for their books, a review or

[1] Such was the case with the great Guy de Maupassant, whose private correspondence was generally so devoid of character it might have been imputed to anybody rather than the author of *Notre Cœur* and *Fort comme la Mort.*

newspaper article on some particular topic of the day. No matter what the conditions, work "to order" is as repugnant to his taste as artificial flowers. The idea must have struck root spontaneously in his own mind and sprouted and blossomed there. And so in all things, Maeterlinck sweeps clear his field of intellectual activity of whatever must else prove a fatal obstacle. He is a wise man, and knows very well the dangers of overwork; so he takes good care, as we saw before, to preserve the balance between his two energies, relieving mental strain by outdoor diversions—watering, weeding, digging at the Quatre Chemins, or making excursions by motor-car or motor-cycle, swimming or angling at St. Wandrille in the Fontenelle, that delicious streamlet which rising actually on the lands of the old monks, waters them as it winds through its beds of cress, and filtering underground through strata

of chalky soil, everywhere shows such a pellucid surface Narcissus need have asked no mirror more crystal clear. But do what he will, all is done systematically and with the maximum of efficiency. Never an hour is wasted in this ordered existence; free to please himself, he has so organised it that he may hearken at his leisure to the mysterious voices that murmur within us; may prolong, without any save a voluntary breach of continuity, the contemplation of the psychical phenomena that fascinate his gaze.

His dream-fancies flourish anywhere, like those kindly plants that will grow in any soil. Not that they are indifferent to an enchanting situation, or that this soul of a lay Benedictine, freed from all theological fetters, does not feel itself more at home than elsewhere in the old Norman Abbey where, in earlier ages, so many meticulous scribes, so many pious

commentators, bent their mystic brows over the parchments they illuminated in the twilight of their cells. At St. Wandrille, the brooding peace, heavy with historic association and world-old mysticism, is a nursing-mother of dreams that would seem made for him, as he for it. But had circumstances installed the author of the *Vie des Abeilles* (Life of the Bee) anywhere else they might have chosen—in a garret or in a cellar—they would not have availed to paralyse his invention, arrest the flow of his imagination, or impoverish his style. He was just as prolific among the factories and *béguinages* of Ghent or in a noisy Paris flat as under the turquoise-blue sky and in the balmy atmosphere of Provence, or in the sad and saintly retirement of St. Wandrille, beneath the Gothic arches rivalling in their soaring grace of architecture the tall trees that front the ruined sanctuary.

MME. GEORGETTE LEBLANC-MAETERLINCK IN THE PART OF "AGLAVAINE"

There is one habit has long tyrannised over him; without the help of tobacco he seemed incapable of receiving inspiration or crystallising it in words. If he has not overcome the need, he has outflanked it. Smoking, he noticed, had lost its virtue as a stimulant, and instead of rousing the brain to activity, as at first, had come to disturb its functions; so now, in lieu of ordinary tobacco, he fills his bowl with a de-nicotinised preparation, tasteless indeed, but harmless. His pipe is still always alight when the pen is busy, but it is hardly more now than an innocent subterfuge intended to cheat and so satisfy an irresistible mechanical craving. Here we have one of those little traits which mark a nature that knows how to compromise wherever necessary, and can discipline the will without entering into violent conflict with it.

Another is Maeterlinck's tenderness

towards all the members of the so-called "inferior" races; above all, to dogs he has devoted pages irradiated with the most feeling of smiles. Two in particular of these "humble" friends of his are familiar, answering to the names of Pelléas and Goland, "for how should an affectionate dog, the loyal and devoted servant of man, dishonour a man's name or a legendary hero's?" Pity for animals and the wish to penetrate the dim twilight of their minds are among the tokens of genuinely superior natures. We have always seen the greatest men stoop to caress the infinitely little, and endeavour to surprise in them the secret of mysterious truths reduced to their most innocent expression. Indeed to say that the author of the *Vie des Abeilles* (Life of the Bee) is interested in all the "brute" creation, and loves in the tiniest to find miniatures of humanity as deserving of loving study

Moi aussi, mon cher ami.
Je ne suis surpris à
songer, avec des regrets
où se mêlait toute
la douceur des bons
souvenirs, aux heures
fraternelles que j'ai
passées chez d'une fois
sous votre toit. Voilà
combien d'années que
nous ne nous sommes
vus?. Malheureusement
suis bien rarement
en Belgique depuis deux
ou trois ans. Me voilà
à peu près définitivement
installé à Paris, où
je ne suis jamais

acclimaté dans un coin
silencieux et provincial.
Mais le compte bien
le mois prochain, revenir
faire un séjour de quelques
semaines dans ma bonne
ville de Gand, et ne pas
laisser échapper l'occasion
de vous serrer la main,
et de me retremper quelques
instants dans la bonne
atmosphère de travail,
de sérénité et de paix
qu'on respire chez vous.

Veuillez me rappeler au
bon souvenir de
Madame Harry et lui
présenter mes plus respectueux
hommages, et croyez-
moi, cher ami, votre bien

as the biggest and most easily decipherable, is to say what every one might have guessed for himself.

What can I add further to this rapid sketch, save my regret to leave it so incomplete—even with the addition of the bibliography of Maeterlinck's works, so far issued or on the point of publication? . . . My admiration of the master, which dates almost from the first coming of this Messiah of great Belgian literature, should perhaps have been based on a much more searching analysis, but the picture in that case must needs have exceeded the limits of the frame.

Here, then, is only an unfinished portrait. But who durst venture the attempt, here and now, to fix definitively at this early date an ideality whose roots go down so deep in past time, and whose expansion in space seems still so far from its apogee! Henceforward every one, in

presence of Maeterlinck, has the vision of one of those mighty torches of light which, from century to century, seek to illumine the issues of the dark labyrinth where life and death grope blindly in eternal gloom. Who can tell what this torch will reveal, long before it fades and dies, or to the confines of what inaccessible realm of nothingness it will lead us as it vanishes? And must we not meanwhile content ourselves with the task of merely following it in its daring course, feasting our eyes on its meteoric splendours, warming ourselves, as close as we can come, at its flame, which flickered shudderingly at first in the darkness, and trembles no more now save with hope? . . .

GÉRARD HARRY.

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

By M. MAETERLINCK

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS[1]

That Friday, 26th of the month of December, about supper time, a little cowherd came to Nazareth, crying out terribly.

Peasants who were drinking herb-beer at the inn of the "Blue Lion" opened the shutters to look out into the orchard of the village, and saw the child running towards them over the snow. They knew him for Korneliz' boy, and shouted to him through the window: "What is the matter? Off with you to bed!"

But the terrified lad answered that

[1] Reprinted from the *Pléiade* of May 1886. See p. 32 above.

the Spaniards were come, that they had fired the farm, hanged his mother among the walnut-trees, and bound his nine little sisters to the trunk of a big tree.

The peasants hurried out of the inn, and crowded round the child and questioned him. He told them further how the soldiers were a-horseback and clad in iron, that they had driven off his uncle Petrus Krayer's cattle, and would soon be got into the forest with the sheep and cows.

All ran to the "Golden Sun," where Korneliz and his brother-in-law were drinking their pot of beer too, and the innkeeper rushed off into the village, shouting that the Spaniards were coming.

Then was there a mighty to-do in Nazareth. The women opened the windows and the peasants ran out of their houses with lights which they extinguished when they reached the orchard, where it was

as bright as midday, because of the snow and the full moon.

They gathered round Korneliz and Krayer on the green in front of the inns. Several had brought their pitch-forks with them and their hay-rakes, and were talking together in frightened voices under the trees.

But as they had no notion what to do, one of them went for the Curé, who owned Korneliz' farm. He came out of his house with the Sacristan carrying the keys of the church. All followed him into the churchyard, and he cried out to them from the top of the tower that he could see nothing in the meadows or the woods, but there were red clouds in the direction of his farm, though the sky was blue and full of stars over all the rest of the countryside.

After holding long debates in the graveyard, they resolved to hide themselves in

the wood which the Spaniards would have to go through, and fall upon them if they were not too numerous, to recover Petrus Krayer's bestial and the booty they had taken at the farm.

They armed themselves with pitchforks and spades, while the women stayed about the church with the Curé.

Searching for a favourable place for their ambush, they came near a mill on the far edge of the forest, and could see the farm blazing against the starlit sky. Then they took post in front of a pool coated with ice, under a clump of enormous oaks.

A shepherd folk called the Red Dwarf went up the hill to warn the miller, who had stopped his mill when he saw the flames on the horizon. However, he let the fellow in, and the two of them stood at a window to look out over the distance.

Away in front the moon was shining down on the fire, and they could see a long procession moving over the snow. When they had well observed it, the Dwarf came down again to those in the woods, and gradually they made out four horsemen, above a flock of beasts that seemed to be cropping the grass.

As they stood at gaze on the edge of the pool and under the trees lighted up by the reflection from the snow, with their blue breeches and red cloaks, the Sacristan showed them a hedge of box, behind which they hid themselves.

The beasts and the Spaniards came on over the ice, and the sheep had reached the hedge and were already beginning to feed when Korneliz broke through the bushes, and the others after him, out into the clear light with their pitchforks. There was then a great slaughter on the frozen pool, all among the thronging

sheep and the cows that stood staring at the battle and the moon.

When they had killed the men and the horses, Korneliz darted off over the meadows towards the flames, while the others stripped the dead. Then they marched back to the village with the flocks. The women, who had their eyes on the heavy mass of the forest behind the churchyard, saw them emerge from among the trees, and ran forward to meet them with the Curé, and all returned home dancing in great glee, the children and dogs crowding round them.

As they were merrymaking under the pear-trees in the orchard, in which the Red Dwarf hung up lanterns to show it was a *kermesse*, they asked the Curé what they must do next.

They decided at last to harness a waggon to bring to the village the woman's body and her nine little girls.

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

The dead woman's sisters and other kinswomen of the family got in, along with the Curé, who was ill at walking, being an old man by now and very stout.

They drove into the forest and, without a word said, came in view of the dazzling expanse of the plain; there they saw the men lying naked and the horses where they had fallen on the gleaming sheet of ice among the trees. Then they made on for the farm that was still alight in the middle of the wide country.

On reaching the orchard and the house flaming red, they pulled up outside the gate to contemplate the farmer's dreadful calamity in his garden. His wife was hanging stark naked from the boughs of an immense walnut-tree, and he was mounting a ladder to climb into the tree, round which the nine little girls

stood waiting for their mother on the grass. He was already clambering among the huge branches, when suddenly he saw against the light of the snow the crowd of folks watching him. He beckoned to them to help him, the tears running down his face, and they came into the garden. So then the Sacristan, the Red Dwarf, the landlord of the "Blue Lion," and the landlord of the "Golden Sun," the Curé with a lantern, and a number of others, climbed up into the snow-covered walnut-tree to cut down the dead body, which the women of the village received in their arms.

The next day they buried her, and nothing further out of the common happened at Nazareth that week. But the Sunday following famished wolves scoured the village after High Mass, and it snowed till midday; then the sun shone out suddenly in the sky, and the peasants

returned home to dinner as usual and dressed for the evening office.

For the moment there was nobody on the green, for it was freezing cruelly. Only the dogs and the cocks and hens were straying under the trees, where some sheep cropped a triangle of turf, and the Curé's maid was busy sweeping away the snow in his garden.

Just then a troop of armed men rode over the stone bridge at the bottom of the village and halted in the orchard-close. Peasants came out of their houses, but ran in again panic-stricken to see it was the Spaniards, and took stand at the windows to watch what would follow.

There was a score and a half of horsemen, in armour, round an old man with a white beard. They carried lansquenets on crupper behind them, some in yellow, some in red, who lighted down and ran about in the snow to stretch their legs.

Then they strode off to the inn of the "Golden Sun" and knocked on the door. It was opened after some hesitation, and they went in and warmed themselves by the fire, ordering the innkeeper to draw beer for them.

Presently they came out again with pots and jugs and wheaten loaves for their comrades ranked round the man with the white beard, who sat there waiting in the middle of the spears.

As the street was deserted, the leader sent horsemen behind the houses to guard the village towards the open country, and bade the lansquenets bring before him the children from two years old and under, to slay them.

They went first to the little inn of the "Green Cabbage" and the barber's cottage, standing side by side in the middle of the street.

One of them opened the sty and a

horde of pigs bolted out and scattered through the village. The innkeeper and the barber came out of their houses and asked the soldiers humbly what they wanted; but they knew no Flemish, and tramped in to look for the children themselves.

The innkeeper had one, a little lad that was crying, in his shirt, on the table where they had just had dinner. A man took him in his arms and carried him off under the apple-trees, while the father and mother ran after him crying out.

The soldiers next opened the cooper's cattle-house, and the blacksmith's, and the shoemaker's, and the calves, cows, donkeys, pigs, goats and sheep wandered about the village-green. When they smashed in the glass of the carpenter's shop-window, several peasants, some of the oldest and richest men of the parish, gathered in the street and approached

the Spaniards. They doffed their hoods and felts very respectfully before the leader in his velvet cloak, asking him what he was going to do; but he did not understand their language either, and some one went off to fetch the Curé.

He was getting ready for the evening office and putting on a gold chasuble in the Sacristy. The peasant called out: "The Spaniards are in the orchard-close!" Terrified, he ran to the church door with the choir-boys, who had the tapers and the censer in their hands.

Then he saw the animals from the cattle-sheds trampling about in the snow and on the grass, the horsemen in the village, the soldiers before the doors, the horses tied to the trees down the street, the men and women in supplication round the fellow who was holding the child in its shirt.

He hurried out into the churchyard, and the villagers turned and looked anxiously at their priest, who appeared like a god glittering with gold among the pear-trees, and crowded round him in front of the man with the white beard.

He spoke in Flemish and in Latin, but the leader only shrugged his shoulders lazily to show he could make nothing of it.

His parishioners kept asking him under their breath: "What does he say? what is he going to do?" Others, seeing the Curé in the orchard, began to come timidly out of their farms, women arrived in haste and whispered together in knots, while the soldiers who were besieging an inn ran up at sight of the crowd gathering on the village-green.

Then the man who was holding the child of the landlord of the "Green

Cabbage" by the leg, sliced off its head with his sword.

They saw it tumble down before their eyes, and the body after it, and this lay bleeding on the grass. The mother picked it up and carried it away, forgetting the head. She ran for the house, but stumbled against a tree and fell flat on her face in the snow, where she lay in a swoon, while the father was struggling between two soldiers.

Some of the younger peasants threw stones and pieces of wood at the Spaniards, but the horsemen lowered their spears all together, the women took to their heels, and the Curé began to scream with horror along with his parishioners, all in the middle of the sheep, the geese and the dogs.

But presently, as the soldiers went off again down the street, they fell silent to see what they meant to do next.

The band marched into the shop kept by the Sacristan's sisters, then came out again quietly without hurting the seven women who were on their knees, praying, on the doorstep.

Next they went to the inn where the Hunchback of St. Nicholas, as he was called, was landlord. There too the door was opened directly, not to anger them; but here they reappeared amid a mighty uproar, with three children in their arms, and surrounded by the Hunchback, his wife and his daughters, who were begging mercy with clasped hands.

On coming up to the old man, they flung down the children at the foot of an elm, where they stayed, sitting on the snow in their Sunday clothes. But one of them wearing a yellow frock got up and tottered off towards the sheep. A soldier ran after it with a naked sword, and the child died, its face buried in the

grass, while they were killing the others round the tree.

All the peasants and the innkeeper's girls took flight with piercing shrieks and scurried back to their farms. Left alone in the orchard, the Curé cried and howled to the Spaniards for mercy, crawling on his knees from one house to another, his arms extended in a cross, while father and mother, sitting in the snow, wept piteously over their dead children where they lay stretched across their knees.

Going up and down the street, the lansquenets noticed the big house of a farmer painted blue. They tried to beat in the door, but it was of oak and studded with nails. So they took some casks frozen in a pool before the door-step and used them to clamber up to the upper floor, where they got in by a window.

There had been a *kermesse* at the

farm, and kinsfolk had been invited to come and eat waffles, cheesecake, and ham with their little ones. At the noise of the broken glass they had mustered behind the table, littered with jugs and dishes. The soldiers pushed their way into the kitchen, and after a great battle, in which several were wounded, they laid hold of the little boys and little girls, as well as the hind, who had bitten a soldier's thumb, and so out again, shutting the door behind them to hinder the folks inside from going with them.

Those of the villagers who had no children crept one by one out of their houses and followed after them at a distance. When they arrived before the old man, carrying their victims, they threw them down on the grass and killed them at their ease, using their spears and swords, while all along the front of the blue-painted house the men and women,

leaning out of the windows of the upper floor and the garrets, were cursing and swearing and waving about their arms madly in the sun, as they saw their little ones, in their red, pink, or white frocks, lying stark and still on the grass under the trees. Then the soldiers hanged the hind from the sign of the "Half Moon" on the other side the street; and a long silence fell upon the village.

Now the slaughter began to spread farther afield. The mothers would bolt from the houses, and darting across flower-gardens and kitchen-plots would run for the open country; but the horsemen pricked after them and hounded them back into the street. Then men, their hoods betwixt their clasped hands, would drag themselves on their knees after the soldiers who were carrying off their children, while the dogs barked gleefully round them in the general

uproar. The Curé, his arms lifted to heaven, was running alongside the houses and under the trees, praying despairingly like a martyr, and soldiers, shivering with cold, blew their fingers as they moved about the road, or hands in the pocket of their trunks and sword under arm, stood waiting under the windows of the houses which their comrades were scaling.

Seeing the grief and terror of the peasants, they began to force their way into the farm-houses in little bands, and all down the street the same scenes were a-doing. A market-garden woman who lived in the old red-brick cottage near the church had a chair, and was running after two fellows with it, who were wheeling off her children in a barrow. She fell sick when she saw them die, and they sat her in the chair, against a tree by the roadside.

Other soldiers climbed up into the

lindens in front of a farm-house painted lilac, and stripped off some of the tiles to gain an entrance. When they came out on the roof again, the father and mother appeared too, stretching up their arms, in the opening, and they forced them back several times over, slashing them over the head with their swords, before they could come down into the street.

One family, imprisoned in the cellar of a very big cottage, was crying and lamenting at the vent-hole, through which the father brandished a pitchfork in blind fury. A bald-headed old man sat sobbing all by himself on a dunghill; a woman in yellow had fallen in a faint on the green, and her husband was holding her up under the armpits, and crying out, in the shade of a pear-tree; another woman, in red, was kissing her little girl, who had no hands now, and kept lifting up the two stumps, first one

and then the other, to see if she would not move. Another escaped into the open, and the soldiers were chasing her among the hay-ricks, on the sky-line of the snowy fields.

Round the inn of the *Four Sons Aymon* was to be seen all the to-do of a regular siege. The inhabitants had barricaded themselves inside, and the soldiers were prowling round the building without being able to force an entrance. They were trying to clamber up the espaliers on the house-front and so mount to the sign-board when they saw a ladder behind the garden door. They clapped it against the wall, and up they went in single file. But then the innkeeper and all his family pitched out of window at them tables and chairs, crockery and cradles. The ladder upset, and the soldiers tumbled down again.

In a boarded hut at the far end of

the village, another band had come upon a peasant-woman bathing her children in a tub before the fire. Being old and almost deaf, she never heard them come in. Two soldiers laid hold of the tub and carried it off, and the woman ran after them, all amazed, with the little ones' clothes, wanting to dress them. But at the doorstep, when of a sudden she saw the splashes of blood in the village, the naked swords in the orchard-close, the women on their knees and others tossing their arms round the dead babes, she set up a dreadful cry, striking at the soldiers, who put down the tub to defend themselves. The Curé ran up too, and clasping his two hands over his chasuble, implored the Spaniards there before the naked children sobbing in the water. Then more soldiers came, who pulled him away and tied the raving woman to a tree.

The butcher had hidden his little girl, and was looking on indifferently, his back against the wall of his house. A lansquenet and one of the men in armour pushed their way in and discovered the child in a copper cauldron. Then the butcher, driven desperate, picked up one of his knives and chased them into the street; but a band that was passing by disarmed him, and hung him up by the wrists to the hooks in the wall, between the flayed carcases of meat, where he kicked his heels and jerked his head, cursing and swearing, till night.

Near the churchyard there was a great crowd before a long, low farm-house, painted green. The farmer was at his door, weeping hot tears; as he was a very fat fellow, with a merry face, some soldiers sitting in the sun under the wall were listening to him pityingly, patting the dog the while. But the man who

was dragging away the child by the hand was making signs as much as to say: "What would you have? it's no fault of mine!"

Another peasant, hotly pursued, jumped into a boat moored to the stone bridge, and pushed off into the lagoon with his wife and children. Not daring to venture on the ice, the soldiers stamped angrily up and down among the rushes. They scrambled up into the willows on the bank to try and reach them with their spears, but they could not; so they stayed a long while, threatening them all where they sat cowering in the middle of the pool.

The orchard, meantime, was still crowded with folk, for it was there they killed the most part of the children, in front of the man with the white beard who presided over the massacre. The little boys and little girls who were old

enough to walk alone were mustered there too, and looked on curiously to see the others die, munching slices of bread and butter for their midday snack, or gathered round the parish idiot, who was sitting on the turf playing the flute.

Then suddenly a long line of people was seen moving up the village. The peasants were running towards the castle, which stands on a high mound of yellow earth at the end of the street. They had caught sight of the Baron leaning over the battlements of his tower, from which he was looking down at the massacre. And men, women, and greybeards, with uplifted hands, made supplication to him as to a king in heaven, standing there in his mantle of violet velvet and his gold bonnet. But he only threw up his arms and shrugged his shoulders, in token he could do nothing, and as they besought

him more and more despairingly, with bared heads, kneeling in the snow and uttering loud and terrible cries, he went back again slowly into the tower, and the peasants lost all hope.

When all the children were killed, the tired soldiers wiped their swords on the grass and supped under the pear-trees. After this, the lansquenets mounted again on crupper, and all together they rode out of Nazareth by the stone bridge, as they had come.

Then the sun set behind the woods, colouring the trees red and throwing a new light over the village. Weary with much running and begging mercy, the Curé had sat down in the snow in front of the church, and his maidservant with him, both staring into the dusk. They could see the street and the orchard-close crowded with peasants in their gala dresses, moving about on the green and

beside the houses. Some families, holding their dead child across their knees or in their arms, were telling over the tale of their misery in dazed voices before the doors. Others were still crying over their little one where it had fallen, alongside a cask, under a barrow, at the edge of a pool, or were carrying the body home without a word. Not a few were already busy washing the benches, chairs, tables, shirts smirched with blood, and gathering up the cradles that had been pitched into the street. But nearly all the mothers were crying and sobbing under the trees, in front of the dead babes stretched on the grass, each recognising her own by their woollen shifts. Those who had no children were roaming about the green and stopping to gaze at the sorrowing groups. The men who had dried their tears had taken the dogs and were chasing their strayed beasts, or

repairing their broken windows and gaping roofs, while the village was settling down into stillness under the bright beams of the moon that slowly climbed up the sky.

Mooris Maeterlinck.

CRITIQUE ON "DAMNATION DE L'ARTISTE"

By M. MAETERLINCK

CRITIQUE ON IWAN GILKIN'S "DAMNATION DE L'ARTISTE"[1]

A POET, intense and strangely clairvoyant, a member of the group of writers that will inaugurate Literature in our poor country, where only the chilling frosts of dead phrases reigned heretofore, a poet whose sagacity and bitterness may well give us pause, has just presented us with the volume of verse we were waiting for. One thing is certain, M. Iwan

[1] From *La Pleïade*, Brussels, 20th February 1890. *La Damnation de l'Artiste*, large 8vo, gilt cloth, with frontispiece by Odilon Redon—Edmond Deman, publisher, Brussels. The poems from the *Damnation de l'Artiste* have been reprinted in *La Nuit*, 18mo.—Fischbacher, publisher, Paris, 1897.

Gilkin's work is portentous, if ever work was. We look on in the course of his pages at a drama of asphyxiation in the depths of a consciousness abnormally darkened, for we have been hurried down instantly and almost unawares incalculably below the levels ordinarily explorable, to find ourselves groping blindly by the inward gleams of hard, keen-edged verses that lick along the walls of this coal-mine like desperate, relentless, malignant flames. They have in them a tragic core implacably compact, mercurial, poisonous, that sets one thinking of the psychological reverse of those bleak, inhospitable tragedies of Shakespeare's sombre-souled contemporary, Cyril Tourneur, of the unbreathable atmosphere. They have, moreover, at times, an ostentation of frankness that is altogether ambiguous; is it the smile of evil, or something more than that? We

travel through an ebon forest, and light unexpectedly, just at the most suspicious-looking crossway, on a flower *wilfully* blue, blue of *malice prepense*. We enter a house of the damned, where never a window opens, where never a drop of the natural rain of heaven falls, where from the gloomy vaults that we feel little by little crushing down about our heads, ooze clammily only medical terms, astringent as alum, words that seem the acrid salt of night, syllables distilled by the alchemy of death, winter, and demoniac scourges, and which nourish with an affected indifference the precarious life of odious and malignant little tufts of pale, unhealthy greenery, wearing at first view an intolerable air of conscious mischief. We wander round the calcined outskirts of Sodom, and are amazed to glimpse in certain secret corners of the walls lilies of a well-tended and persistent

freshness. What are we to make of it? It is startling to discern these patches of fair white at the gates of hell, to see these strange, haunting blossoms reflected in the stagnant waters where Gomorrah sleeps in death. Is it the Angel who cools the flames as he passes through them, or the world-old enemy of the Angel who stirs up to a white heat the freshness of the petals which he would fain have in spite of everything? At a first impression, one may well be mistaken, and I have only put down here a first impression.

But as we linger in the sombre and enchanted realms of the poet—and they well deserve we should pitch our tent there for a winter's night—we begin to discern, as the eye grows accustomed to the nocturnal aspects of the words, strange metamorphoses in the dim ambiguity of the work; lo and behold! the

stifled flowers of candour shoot up, expand, burgeon forth, appear the only native produce of the soil, admirably and puissantly unconscious, rising high above the unreal and perversely-sought evil. Where no spice of horror is, says Hello, there neither love nor light is to be found; and that is exactly how it stands here—the horror is the exasperation of beauty, the blasphemy is the despite of unacknowledged adoration, the cruelty is the supreme spasm of pity, and the hate the fine frenzy of love. So now we have the reverse side of the first impression. The evil which loomed like an accursed city on the hill-top is absorbed with all its ruins in an expansion and blossoming forth, righteous, truthful and superb, of unconscious good. Horror with a thousand alloys is the strange vase wherein are gathered the sacred, silent waters which the work distils, unknowingly

perhaps. And is it not by examining *what he has not consciously intended* that we penetrate the essence of a poet? The poet premeditates this, premeditates that, but woe to him if he does not attain something else beside! He enters with his lamp the treasure-house of darkness and the ineffable, but woe to him, if he knows to a jot and tittle with what booty he returns, and if the best part of his glory is not the jewel he has won by mistake! Woe to him if he has divined all its secrets, and if he has been able for an instant to hold his work in control betwixt his two hands!

MAURICE MAETERLINCK.

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[1] All the dates given are those of the first editions; many others have since appeared.

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